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The Issues of the Rebellion.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

TAUNTON AND RAYNHAM VOLUNTEERS,

COL. D. N. COUCH, COMMANDING.

SABBATH EVENING, JUNE 2, 1861,

BY REV. MORTIMER BLAKE, PASTOR OF THE WINSLOW CHURCH.



TAUNTON:

PRINTED AT THE REPUBLICAN OFFICE,
Bristol County Bank Building.

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Taunton, June 3d, 1861.

REV. MORTIMER BLAKE,

DEAR SIR: The young men, at whose request you delivered last Sabbath an address before the volunteers of our town, believing that the soldiers for whom it was prepared, and their numerous friends, would be gratified with an opportunity of perusing its just statement of the issues involved in the present war, as well as the wise and affectionate counsels which it contains, request that you will furnish us with a copy for publication.

Respectfully Yours,

E. DAWES,
R. S. WASHBURN,
WM. H. GILMORE,
L. SOULE,
E. BOWMAN,
P. WILLIAMS,
Committee.

Taunton, June 4, 1861.

GENTLEMEN: The sermon which you request is herewith cheerfully submitted to your disposal; with the earnest hope that its crude suggestions to an audience so unusual, may be as kindly received by them as they were kindly intended.

Yours, with respect,

MORTIMER BLAKE.

Messrs. E. Dawes, R. S. Washburn, &c.

SERMON.

“Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles.”—II. CHRONICLES, 32: 7, 8.

The sacred writer adds: “And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.”

And it is no wonder that they did. To be in the majority, and that majority being the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles, is reason enough to be strong and courageous. But may we assume that the Lord is with us in the present clash of arms? That depends upon the ends we are seeking to accomplish. If these ends are right, then we may believe that the invisible Presence which dwelt in Judah is helping us. It is therefore of first importance to understand the real objects of the unusual sights we see in our land,—the drilling of soldiers, the mustering of armies, the hurrying of fleets, and the anxious watching of the telegraph for news of their movements. That these objects do stand connected in some way with God and Christianity is evident from your presence as soldiers here in the house of God, to consecrate your uniforms and weapons with the services of religion before you go to use them on the morrow, as we learn you have received orders. I can think of nothing, therefore, more important to urge upon you, from the pulpit, than *a clear understanding of the issues you are called to settle.*

Every one of you needs this knowledge that you may act intelligently and unitedly and vigorously in the hour of decision.

I. What, then, are the issues you are summoned to decide; and

II. How shall you as soldiers most effectively aid in their decision.

These are the points around which my remarks shall cluster. And.

1. The first and immediate issue is the existence of our civil government.

We have long heard threats of disunion, and nullification, and secession, from some parts of the country: but we have believed them to be the tactics of politicians to carry their projects. We have read the votes and resolves of local conventions to withdraw from the Union, but we supposed they were paper rebellions—talk, the safety-valves for excitable communities. But now our long and singular blindness is cured. We see there is a desperate earnestness in this secession. There has been a long-laid, crafty plot to explode this government of our fathers into fragments, and to substitute for it an abominable despotism based upon slavery. Traitors had crept into high offices, where they could strip the loyal people of their defenses and collect the arms and money of the nation into their own hands ready for use; and they had filled the petty offices with trusty menials to co-operate with them; and then, when our fleets were sent off to the corners of the earth, or anchored within their own reach, and when our federal army was scattered in little helpless bands on the outside frontiers, or stowed away in half-provisioned forts, and when the treasury was emptied by intentional defalcations, and the executive powers were passing into new hands, then they suddenly rose from their ambush and rushed for the prey. Then they boasted of their success, and appointed the day when the arch usurper would sit in the capitol, and dine at the empty table of our runaway President.

Through our divided state of feeling, and our complete devotion to money and compromises, they expected to secure a quick and complete overthrow of the Government, and to dictate to us the terms on which we might continue to live under their protection, or be excluded in the cold from the sunshine of their favor. It seemed for a moment, as if they

would succeed in their nefarious revolution. But when the first stunning effects of the surprising blow began to pass by, reason rallied, and conscience, and patriotism, and religion, all rallied to the defense of our dearest inheritance, and the men of all parties, creeds, and birthplaces, have risen to hurl back the traitors and rebels to their own place. Never was there a more thrilling sight in the earth; never a more sacred resort to the last awful arguments of war; never a rush to arms more justifiable by the rights of self-defense and precepts of christianity! It is like the uprising of Judah against the invasion of Assyria. It is a defense of the very existence of civil government and laws, against despotism; and the Lord God is with us to fight our battles in behalf of his own divinely established institutions. We can think no otherwise.

This, then, is the first and immediate issue which you are called to help decide,—and your prompt and even impatient enlistment shows, whenever you shall be called to strike the blow for our country, where it will fall. Our country and its free institutions! Dear sirs, was there ever such a land to strike for before? The advance land of all the nations, save in the one dire evil which has bred all the other disasters! the land of such ancestors and of such histories! of such institutions whose elementary principles were found in the word of God by the English puritans, illustrated by the Ironsides of Cromwell, expressed in the compact of the Mayflower Pilgrims, and established by Washington and his fellow patriots! and whose happy fruits are borne in the wonderful prosperity and religious labors of the free North for almost a century! Not to stand in defense of such principles, not to dash back the traitors and rebels who would spoil such a goodly heritage, would prove us unfit to have them,—unfit to bear the name of freemen and of christians! When we consider this issue, it is no wonder that all other issues which have divided us heretofore are forgotten, and that such an enthusiastic offering of men and means is made to the government, that there is not room enough to receive them!

But there are involved in this cause, in which you have enlisted, more than the existence of our civil government. Therefore I observe,

2. You are called to protect and preserve the vital interests of posterity.

I can say to you, as Nehemiah said to the nobles and people when they were defending Jerusalem from the perfidy of Tobias and Sanballat and their fellow conspirators: "Be ye not afraid of them: remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." and not for these only, but for those that shall come after you. God has linked the generations together, so that we transmit from one to the other whatever of blessings or of curses we may have in our hands. The generations of men are like the successive arches of a bridge, over which the heritage of the past passes through the present down to the future. If one of the arches is weak and falls under its burden, the transit is broken and the future is cut off from its inheritance. On us and you of this hour are resting all the hopes and blessings of the future. These are in utmost peril. The arch of the present is assaulted. It is shaken, and you are called out in haste to defend it. You are at the junction, or the Relay house between the past and future, to guard it from traitors; so that the heritage of our free government, our free press, our free speech, and every other good of living, shall not be cut off from the generations down the line of time. By and by, when this crisis shall have passed,—and Heaven grant it may be quickly, when the arch traitors shall have been defeated and meet their doom, and when their deluded followers shall have been driven back undeceived, and in contrition at their ignorant madness, then shall you enjoy the fruits of such a victory, and your names will be cherished by your grateful successors to a thousand generations. Think, therefore, that you are to decide whether yourselves and your children shall have a free home and liberty for your own old age and theirs, if you

come to it, or shall be compelled to sit out your days with closed lips under the fetters of an iron despotism, such as now suppresses or drives out all the friends of Union and Freedom from the South. It is no immediate question of to-day merely which you shall decide, but is for all time, the pivot on which balance the freedom and despotism of the nation's future,—the strife of arms has to determine the scales. And as God has promised the future of the earth to grow bright in largest blessings, who can doubt that he is with us in this crisis of its future!

3. Another issue involved in this rebellion is, the possibility of civil and religious freedom in the earth.

The problem of national self-government has been repeatedly tried, and under a variety of circumstances, but never under so encouraging as in our own land. Of the sturdy Saxon stock, purified by persecutions and expatriated for principles, the original was the best seed of the old kingdoms. Laying the foundations of government in the midst of enemies, when every stone must be laid with the solidity and precision of a fortress,—cemented into one people by a long struggle with old monarchies for leave to be,—and having stood the weakening tests of nearly a century's prosperity,—the eyes of all the struggling nations trying to be free have turned here for guidance and hope. The ever-growing constellation of our flag, as it floats in their ports, is the inspiring lode-star of their courage, and its stripes are as the ruddy beams of day-break that their day of redemption also draweth nigh. That flag, as the emblem of freedom, is the cynosure of the nations. The immigrant forgets to sigh for his native land when the shadow of its folds falls upon his head. Hence it is that all nationalities, the English, the Scotch, the Irish, the German, the Italian, the Hungarian, rush to defend it from the treacherous hands which would tear down this banner of popular liberty to the world. For their all is committed to its triumph as certainly as our own. The organs of

European aristocracy may grin at the prospect of its surrender. The London Times may grimly say "the great republic has gone;" but if that flag shall be supplanted by the stealthy rattle-snake and the useless palmetto, the people of the world will weep in the starless night of their sorrow! No sirs! the hand of God prepared this American citadel of liberty and blessed the hands which planted on it the flag of liberty, and we cannot believe that he will suffer it to be lowered, longer than to wash out the one black stain of its heaven-colored union! Whether it shall float to cheer the earth in hope of universal civil and religious liberty is one of the issues which, under God, are committed to your decision.

With such a trust, we feel sure that you will not lower our flag of hope to the world, to an enemy so long as you have an arm left to defend it! Next below the banner of the cross—as the world's salvation, shall be the banner of our union—as the world's freedom. On the sacred emblem of our redemption we will nail the flag of our country, and then we will bear them on together, as the advance standard of the world's millennium. So you, the soldiers, and we, the preachers, will be working together in this contest like Nehemiah's men. The one building the wall, and the other standing guard with his spear and habergeon.

But these are not all the issues you are called to decide. I cannot even mention all. They embrace every thing which makes life desirable, or the gospel itself fully effective. The results which shall follow, when this monstrous rebellion is subdued, will show that the soldier was never ordered out in a more righteous cause,—never entered the bloody strife with more numerous and earnest prayers for his success,—never pushed his long campaign with surer indications that the Lord God will fight his battles.

If this rebellion shall be successfully resisted—and no one can doubt that result,—not only will the immediate issues I have mentioned be decided, but other as valuable results collateral to them will be gained. 1. There will be an end of

such braggart disunionism and domineering dictation, of such truckling and pacifying compromises, as have made us hang our heads for shame before the world. Traitors will have learned that, however blind or corrupt politicians may be, the people cherish freedom in their hearts, and will speak, whenever she cries for succor, with the roar of a thousand batteries. The heart of the people, when you come to it, is right yet—the old revolutionary blood has not been diluted away with government pap and old rye whiskey. 2. Another result will be, the beginning of the end of slavery. The Richmond Whig admits that “secession is abolitionism in its most dangerous form.” It opens a crack wide enough for slavery to escape; and the slave, who loves his master so well, is wonderfully quick to see the crack and improve it. The hand of God to abolish slavery through this rebellion, is nowhere so evident as in making contraband that particular species of property which is to be found only on one side of the conflict, and for which really the conflict itself has been precipitated. 3. Again, there shall be a triumph of the last test of the ability of a free people to defend themselves—namely: the test of internal treason. Such a satanic iniquity as this treason is can never again grow to such fearful dimensions in this country. We have learned to watch our rulers. Great problems are demonstrated but once. And this country, having stood the test of both prosperity and extension, of outside antagonism and inside treacheries, and awakened to a ceaseless vigilance, shall have a vista of magnificent developement opened into the future; in whose distance beams and brightens the millennial day, when plough-shares and pruning hooks shall be the sole needed weapons of her free and peaceful population.

These I believe to be the issues and results you are called to help decide. I say again, they are the most precious for which you can lay down your life. The existence of our noble government, the future of our successors, the hopes of all nations, the civil and moral redemption of the world.—How

sacred and solemn is your mission! How earnest are our prayers that you may accomplish it! That you may do so, permit me to give you a few hints as to your own individual duty, when you shall be called to the field.

1. Hang up, as a campaign map before you, the grand and glorious results which you are to gain. Let these keep your patriotism aglow, your heart strong, your purposes pure. In the weary march, the dusty bivouac, the rainy night-watch, look on the map of your destination and be strong. When you shall be pacing the solitary sentinel-rounds, think of the loved ones sleeping securely at home, because you are on the watch for their stealthy enemy, and let it sharpen your vigilance as if you were guarding the very door of your home. When you are on the exhausting march, to rout the lurking traitors from their entrenchments, let it be as the thrilling music to your feet that its length measures their distance from us. When you hear the whistle of the bullet, think that you are standing as the shield of the world's precious hopes.

2. Remember your invisible Commander and Helper. We tell you, as Moses told Israel near Canaan, "the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee: therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee." Such an ally as Jehovah, you cannot afford to offend by transgressions of his law! We have heard that the camp is the accumulation of all temptations, and unless you are filled with a devout fear of God, we tremble not only at your moral perils,—but lest God should be provoked to send corrections and rebuffs upon you. Let your fear of God and honor of the government be entwined together!

3. Remember that you will be the representatives of free-men, and especially of Massachusetts, and act in all things worthy of our little but glorious state. The Massachusetts Fourth, in which this town has its beloved and patriotic representatives, has had the honor of stepping first on the traitor's soil. The Massachusetts Eighth has had the hon-

or, in conjunction with the New York Seventh, of opening the first beam of relief upon our beleaguered capitol. The Massachusetts Sixth has had the honor, so deserving of its Lexington birth-place, of shedding the first blood in defending liberty. Let the Massachusetts Fifteenth gather some equal honor to wreath about the name of our beloved Commonwealth. You have as commanding officers of your companies, men who, we are confident, will not dishonor the authority of their commissions. And as the commander of your regiment, you have a colonel, all whose past antecedents in the field prove that he will lead you where laurels are to be gathered, if any can be found within reach of your arms.

But above mere military honor, I beg you to remember that our state honor stands not more in our wealth and energy, than in our morality and the religious integrity. You will represent not Lexington and Bunker Hill only, but Fanuel Hall and Plymouth Rock also. You will represent the school house and the meeting house,—yes, the first meeting house of Plymouth, with the praying congregation below, and the flat roof and mounted cannon above; the gospel and arms to defend it. Remember that you shall be specimen yankees from the Pilgrim state, so misrepresented and so hated by our enemies, and always and everywhere be such specimens, in honor and morality and fidelity and religion, as to make the name a glory to yourselves, and a terror to your enemies. You bear a precious reputation! Don't forget it! Don't dishonor it!

4. Keep yourselves in the best vigor to work effectively. Sickness kills double of the bullet; and sickness comes of vice and careless exposes. Beware of them. It shall be a bright honor to these companies if you will pledge yourselves to a man to abstain from all intoxicating drinks; as our company in the navy have refused their grog. Remember that the bottle is twice poisoned to our troops in the traitors' country. They stop at no villainy to destroy your lives. We charge every one of you to pledge yourselves against it, if you have not al-

ready, as the best warrant of your health and vigor to stand the exposures of a campaign. Let every other vice be put in the same pledge of total abstinence. Your country calls for able bodied men, and it shall not be honestly answering her call for you to disable yourselves by indulgencies which shall make your nerves unsteady and your eye dim in the ady of battle, when you shall need a quick eye and a sure aim. Keep your body in as good fighting condition as your musket. Pardon me if I am too particular, but I must exhort you

5. To swear not at all, and to respect the duties and forms of religion. You are going on a sacred mission, not only for liberty but for christianity. Religion looks anxiously and prayerfully on the strife, for her invaluable interests are in peril. You are followed by the prayers and sympathies of all christians, and you must not be the profane defenders of a sacred cause. Ministers of the gospel, members of churches, devout christians, are enlisted with you for conscience sake, and you will find the sabbath service and prayer meeting institutions in the camp, and of its most effective defenses too! We beg you not to be neglectors of this most important store house of supplies. Who can keep and defend you like the Lord of Hosts? When can his mercy-seat be more precious to you, than in the morning, when your knapsack is packed for advance against the enemy? or in the evening, when you are to spend the night as a scout among hidden rifles? Wherever you are, God will be near you to help you, if you will call upon him. We beg you to be men of prayer. If you have not been, begin now. Cromwell's men were invincible, because they drew their courage from heaven. The pilgrims prayed, and stood like a rock. Washington prayed, and the alder clumps around his army's tents were all closets of prayer. It was through the power of their prayers that his shoeless regiments conquered on the sharp and icy battle fields. Be you not afraid to lay hold of the arm or the mighty God of your fathers. Dear sirs! be men of prayer, and you shall be safe in any issue.

I must be done, and yet I am loth to close. If you shall be summoned to the field of actual battle, it is not probable that every one of you will return again. But who will be left behind, it is not given to us to know. In your common exposure to a sudden death, I shall be unfaithful to my duty and to my own feelings, not to exhort each one of you to take care of your own soul. Make a sacred convent with your God and Saviour, as your first preparation for the unseen bullet. Then your best estate will be secured. Never more than now do you need to have the Redeemer for your friend, and your souls' interests calmly and surely committed to his care. Peace with God should certainly go before war with men.

May God bless you, soldiers and fellow townsmen, every one, and have you in his holy keeping! May you act worthily of the honorable name you carry, and the towns you represent. When you shall be called to stand "in the imminent deadly breach," may you be strong and courageous, and put to flight the miserable, misguided traitors of our country. And finally, when this strife is over—and may it not cease till it is rightly and fully ended, may you each safely return, ennobled by your noble cause, to enjoy the blessings you have so nobly volunteered to go to defend. And if any of you shall fall and return to us no more, your memories shall be precious with us forever. Our sympathies and our prayers go with you, and may it strengthen you in the day of battle, to know that we are remembering you always before our Father's God and yours! God bless you all.





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